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## *House of Representatives*

# JOSHUA OMVIG VETERANS SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT

**HON. BOB FILNER**

OF CALIFORNIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. ...Mr. Speaker, before I introduce the author of the legislation, I just want to say in introduction, unfortunately, suicide prevention has become a major part of our responsibilities to both active duty and our veterans.

It is a terrible statistic, Mr. Speaker, but as many Vietnam veterans have now committed suicide as died in the original war. That is over 58,000. We have to do as a Nation a better job. The Army just announced recently that the suicide rate among active duty and recently discharged has now reached Vietnam proportions. So we have to do a far better job and we intend to do that.

The author of the original legislation, Mr. *Boswell* from Iowa, saw this very clearly and introduced this bill.

Mr. Speaker, one of the top priorities of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in this Congress is to address the needs of our returning servicemembers. The House passed

H.R. 327, the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, on March 21st of this year. I'm pleased the Senate also made it a priority to act on this important legislation. I believe the bill shows a clear compromise in our efforts to provide help to those in need.

One of the most pressing issues facing our men and women is mental health care. I believe that if we send our men and women off to war, we must, as a nation, do all we can to address their health care needs when they return. We cannot ask them to fight and then forget them when they return from battle. Veterans suffer a higher risk of suicide than the general population. The stress of combat, combined with the stigma that exists for servicemembers and veterans seeking mental health care services can have disastrous consequences.

We must do everything possible to improve the VA's mental health services, and its ability to detect, and help, those veterans most at risk. H.R. 327 will provide the important

tools to assist the VA in strengthening suicide prevention, education, and awareness programs within the VA by mandating a comprehensive program for suicide prevention among veterans.

I thank my colleague Mr. *Boswell* for introducing this bill, and I thank my colleagues for their support....

As a Nation, in the name of Joshua Omvig and for his family and for all the families who have suffered from suicide, we have got to do a better job as a Nation. We have just got to do a better job. We know what will happen if we fail.

Vietnam veterans have paid a heavy price for our refusal to look at mental health as important as physical health, for our refusal to look into the souls of our young veterans and recognize that they are crying out for help.

So we have to get this right, and this is a good step in doing it.

Again, I thank Mr. *Boswell* and all the Iowa Representatives for taking a tragedy that befell Joshua Omvig and his family and turning it into a positive that will help all of us in America achieve better health care for our veterans.